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Chairman: Mr. Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)
later: Mr. Lewis (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 84: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/55/13, A/55/329, A/55/391, A/55/402, A/55/425, A/55/428 and A/55/456)

1. **Mr. Pohan** (Indonesia) said that, regrettably, the debate on the item was taking place against a backdrop of increasing violence and tension in the occupied territories. His delegation appealed for the cessation of the excessive use of force against the unarmed civilian population and for an end to the exacerbation of the plight of Palestine refugees. The United Nations undoubtedly bore a historical and moral responsibility towards those refugees. By mandating the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide them with social and economic assistance, the Organization had played a crucial role in averting a historical catastrophe. He noted with satisfaction the endeavours of UNRWA in such areas as development of human resources, utilization of a unified registration system based on integrated computerized databases, implementation of a special hardship programme involving food support, shelter rehabilitation and poverty alleviation initiatives, granting of preferential access to its training centres, and implementation of social development programmes for youth, women and persons with disabilities. Those efforts deserved to be sustained, particularly in the light of the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. Settlement activities, closure of the territories, detentions, expropriation of Palestinian-owned lands and delays in releasing all Palestinian prisoners had serious social and economic repercussions, and not only for the region in question. Indonesia had always supported the cause of the Palestinian people and it had, within its modest means, provided assistance to it in its struggle for self-determination and statehood.

2. Although the funds provided to the Agency by donor countries had increased, that process had not kept pace with the growth of the refugee population, as a result of which cost reduction measures had been taken, affecting the refugees themselves. It was to be hoped that the donor countries would continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian people to meet its urgent and vital needs.

3. **Mr. Kasoulides** (Cyprus) said that his delegation wished to align itself with the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union, with which Cyprus was associated. The recent disturbing events in the region had created a very dangerous situation, and living conditions had worsened dramatically, particularly for Palestine refugees in Gaza and the West Bank. The inhabitants of the region had suffered greatly as a result of that continuing crisis, although mention must be made of the efforts of the international community, donor countries and especially the dedicated staff of UNRWA to alleviate the sufferings of Palestine refugees, who were in the most difficult position. Cyprus, which had close and friendly relations with the countries of the Middle East, attached great importance to the improvement of the economic and social conditions of the Palestinians and hoped for the achievement of lasting peace and security in the Middle East. Following the 1974 invasion, Cyprus itself had long received generous international aid to assist the displaced population and revitalize the devastated economy.

4. Regarding the activities of UNRWA, his delegation shared the concern of the Commissioner-General about the serious financial difficulties encountered by the Agency in carrying out its programmes, which were inevitably having an adverse impact on the level and quality of services. The slow and painful peace process had raised hope that the United Nations resolutions would be implemented in the near future. The events of the past few weeks had shaken those hopes, without breaking them. His delegation was convinced that the peace process would resume. In the current situation, the work of UNRWA was even more important. The Agency must be placed on a secure financial footing, and his delegation appealed for additional and increased contributions in order to alleviate the plight of the thousands of suffering Palestinians. Cyprus had developed its own assistance scheme, which included technical assistance programmes and training of Palestinian officials and civil servants in Cyprus, and it had recently dispatched medical supplies and medical personnel to the region.

5. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that the problem of the refugees was deeply rooted in a political issue, and that it remained essential to settle that problem once and for all in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions. The current situation in the region required

the international community to continue its efforts at achieving a comprehensive settlement that would ensure a durable peace.

6. The report of the Working Group highlighted the precarious financial situation of the Agency and the negative effect of the budget shortfall of $61.4 million, which, regrettably, had led to the imposition of austerity measures, curtailing expansion of socio-economic programmes at a period of growth in the refugee population. In that connection, the strenuous efforts of the Commissioner-General to keep donors informed through regular consultations and the provision of quarterly financial reports were highly appreciated, as was the continuing effort to reform the financial and management system on the basis of current technology. In underscoring the obligation of the international community to reaffirm its commitment to the cause of Palestinian refugees through assistance to UNRWA, his delegation endorsed the appeal urging all Governments to make contributions to the Agency in a timely and generous manner in order to ensure that its services could continue and that services cut as a result of the austerity measures could be restored.

7. **Mr. Ahmad** (Malaysia) said that his country strongly condemned the provocative actions which had led to the critical situation in the very area where the Agency operated, and the continuing violence and excessive use of force which had resulted in the deaths of over one hundred people, many of whom were refugees. His country called on all parties, in particular Israel, to put a stop to those senseless deaths and suffering.

8. His delegation attached great importance to the work of UNRWA, and commended the Governments of such refugee host countries as Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic for their support and assistance to Palestinian refugees. At the same time, it was concerned at the negative effects of the Agency's financial situation. It took note of the recommendations contained in the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, commended the initiatives of the Commissioner-General in seeking increased contributions from traditional major donors, and shared the concern raised by the Commissioner-General that one of the major factors aggravating the financial situation of the Agency was the unpredictable performance of world currency markets. A budget cut of $10 million was substantial and affected the Agency's activities. His delegation expressed the hope that the international community would make contributions to the budget of the Agency so that UNRWA could continue to provide its vital services to Palestinian refugees.

9. **Mr. Al-Adsani** (Kuwait) thanked UNRWA and its Commissioner-General for the excellent report and the large amount of work they had accomplished. His delegation appealed for the continued provision of comprehensive assistance to refugees, despite all the difficulties facing the Agency, and for full implementation of the latter's mandate as stipulated in the General Assembly resolutions.

10. Kuwait had provided and continued to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees through the implementation of various projects, in particular in the area of infrastructure; its annual contribution amounted to about $5 million. Unfortunately, through its policy in the occupied Territories and its refusal to observe the relevant United Nations resolutions, Israel continued to violate the norms of international law and hindered the normal work of the Agency. As noted at the October summit conference of Arab States held in Cairo, peace in the Near East could be achieved only on the basis of the principles of equality and justice. Kuwait was prepared to continue contributing to UNRWA, so that the Agency could overcome its financial difficulties and continue to provide its necessary services to Palestinian refugees.

11. **Mr. Hodgkins** (United States of America) said that his country strongly supported the activities of UNRWA in providing assistance to Palestinian refugees, especially in the areas of health care and education, and believed that the Agency could overcome its current financial problems through reform efforts. However, his Government could not support an unbalanced resolution, since that would not facilitate the restoration of peace in the Near East, which could only be achieved on the basis of an agreement among the interested parties. The Committee needed to make every effort to encourage their aspirations for peace.

12. **Mr. Hawkins** (Australia) said that his country had long supported the Agency in its practical assistance to the problem of Palestinian refugees and was committed to supporting the Middle East peace process, as the visit of its Prime Minister, John Howard, to the West Bank and Gaza had shown. His Government was deeply concerned at the suffering

which had recently occurred in those territories and in Israel, and was providing emergency aid in the hope that it would help to end the violence and return the parties to the peace process.

13. **Mr. Karagoz** (Turkey) said that his delegation deplored the recent tragic events in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and stressed that a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East could only be achieved through dialogue and full compliance with the agreements already reached. The opportunity for continuing the peace process must not be missed, and Turkey was prepared to extend its utmost support in that respect.

14. At the core of the problem of Palestine was the fate of the Palestinian refugees, whose problems were currently predominantly humanitarian. Therefore, UNRWA performed an important function in providing services in the areas of education, health care and social protection. His delegation commended the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, Mr. Hansen, for his tireless efforts, and the report of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, of which Turkey served as Chairman, for drawing attention to the Agency's difficult financial situation.

15. Referring to the reports of the Secretary-General, in particular on the University of Jerusalem "Al-Quds" for Palestinian refugees, he expressed his Government's wish to revitalize the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine and underlined Turkey's readiness to contribute actively to efforts to address the various aspects of the Palestinian problem in different forums.

16. **Mr. Nacerodien** (South Africa) said that UNRWA continued, as ever, to carry out its functions successfully, despite severe financial constraints, and to provide much needed assistance to Palestine refugees, thereby contributing to the maintenance of stability and the pursuit of peace. It was therefore disturbing to learn, from the report of the Commissioner-General of the Agency, of the imposition by Israel of further restrictions on the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff, which was obstructing their humanitarian activities, in contravention of the norms of international law relating to United Nations personnel. The Non-Aligned Movement had reiterated its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with its capital in East Jerusalem, and had called for the strict implementation of all United Nations resolutions concerning Palestine refugees. His delegation believed that the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence was crucial to the attainment of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It was incumbent on the international community to make every effort to ensure respect for the norms of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories until a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the problem of Palestine refugees was achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

17. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the tragedy of the Palestinian people had already lasted for more than half a century and that, throughout that time, Israel had maintained its policy of ignoring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian population. The recent tragic events in Jerusalem, in which many Palestinian martyrs had perished, were the latest manifestation of that policy. Paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) provided for the return of the refugees to their homes and the payment of compensation for their property. Since its adoption in 1948, the international community and, in particular, the General Assembly had repeatedly reaffirmed the inalienable right of Palestine refugees to return and to establish their own independent State. The continued disregard of the acute problem of Palestine refugees would in no way help to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East, yet successive Israeli Governments had not only failed to contribute to the solution of that problem, but had endeavoured to aggravate the situation still further by provoking the Palestinians, who were living in extremely difficult social and economic conditions.

18. He expressed appreciation for the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA; the Agency was doing important work in difficult circumstances to provide services to the many Palestine refugees. He was concerned about the financial situation of UNRWA, particularly its budget deficit, which had persisted and even increased at a time when the number of refugees requiring assistance was growing. That was taking place against the background of the developments in the peace process and after the holding of a number of major United Nations conferences, including the recent Millennium Summit, at which it had been emphasized that the international

community must show solidarity with Palestine refugees and provide them with assistance to alleviate their plight.

19. The Syrian Arab Republic was providing significant support to Palestine refugees through a whole range of projects, and its financial contribution to the development of health care, education and social services was noted in the relevant sections of the report of UNRWA. However, the task of providing assistance to the refugees was the responsibility of the entire international community, and his delegation called on donor countries to ensure that the Agency had the necessary level of resources to overcome its financial difficulties and discharge fully its mandate to provide services to Palestine refugees. His delegation hoped that the day would come when the international community could finally implement all General Assembly resolutions on that issue and allow Palestine refugees to return to their homes and to a peaceful existence. Israel, however, was demonstrating through its uncompromising policy and the intensification of repression against the Palestinians that it was not ready for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East leading to the realization of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian population and, first and foremost, the right of the refugees to return to their homes.

20. **Mr. Naji Abiassi** (Lebanon) said that recent events had shown that partial, bilateral and temporary solutions would not serve their purpose without a just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question in all its aspects. In order to ensure that such a settlement was lasting and reflected the interests of all parties, it must be based on the norms of international law and the relevant resolutions of the Madrid Conference and provide for the withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian territories. The Palestinian people must be given the opportunity to exercise its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish an independent State in its national territory with the capital in Jerusalem.

21. His delegation appreciated the efforts of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and the Agency's staff to implement its mandate. It was grateful to donor countries that had met the expenses incurred by UNRWA in providing for the basic needs of hundreds of thousands of refugees. The observance in 2000 of the fiftieth anniversary of the commencement of UNRWA activities was an appropriate moment to reaffirm the importance of the Agency's endeavours. His delegation wished to reiterate the need to find a just solution to the problem of Palestine refugees, particularly those in Lebanon. That solution must reaffirm their right to return to their homeland, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and the norms of international law. In that connection, Lebanon rejected for various reasons the establishment, in any form, of settlements for Palestine refugees in its territory. That was the principle on which all segments of Lebanese society had agreed after long and painful years of struggle. It was enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution of Lebanon and was an important element of the policy of national reconciliation in the country.

22. Lebanon had assumed a heavy burden by sheltering thousands of refugees in its territory and was providing significant support to the Palestinian people in their struggle. Lebanon could not, however, take responsibility for the permanent establishment of Palestine refugees in its territory. The Palestinians agreed with Lebanon and were refusing to settle permanently in Lebanon. They were firmly resolved to demand the realization of their lawful right to return to their own territory. The permanent establishment of Palestinians outside the framework envisaged in the peace plan could destabilize the situation and undermine peace and security in the Middle East.

23. His delegation wished to make a number of comments regarding the resolution of the Palestine refugee problem. Firstly, the Special Committee on Palestine (Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People) established as a result of the multilateral negotiations was not the appropriate mechanism for resolving the Palestinian problem, since its main mandate consisted of examining ways and means of improving the living conditions of the Palestinians. Lebanon would not participate in the work of that committee or other committees dealing with such problems until progress was made in the bilateral talks, which had currently been suspended owing to Israel's intransigence and its refusal to adopt a just and sound decision. Secondly, an agreement over a definitive settlement of the Palestine refugee problem could not be reached by the parties concerned without the agreement of host countries. His delegation was concerned that UNRWA should preserve its archives and documents relating to refugees and their families.

24. His delegation reiterated its willingness to cooperate with UNRWA in successfully implementing its mandate. The international community bore the main responsibility for creating appropriate living conditions for Palestinian refugees temporarily residing in host countries. UNRWA was undertaking efforts to that end. Meanwhile, his delegation urged the international community to assume responsibility for achieving the right of the Palestinian people to return to their territory. It was vital to study the highly dangerous consequences of the current situation which had arisen because Israel had closed the door on peace. Such a situation carried with it new dangers relating to immigration and a new outflow of people from Palestinian territories. The Lebanese delegation hoped that UNRWA would rise to the task before it.

25. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) expressed strong appreciation for the efforts undertaken by UNRWA to provide services to Palestinian refugees. The UNRWA budgetary deficit and the lack of available cash explained the current crisis. The lack of funding in recent years had diluted the Agency's efforts. UNRWA had made attempts to identify new methods of financing and to minimize the harmful impact of the current financial crisis on core programmes. The funding deficit must not be allowed to affect core programmes. However, it might not turn out to be such a serious cause for concern in the light of the Agency's activities over the past five decades, during which time it had surmounted all obstacles. Financial difficulties must not be allowed to prevent the Agency from fulfilling the noble objectives before it.

26. It was vital to urge payment of voluntary contributions. The financial resources allocated had permitted some improvement in the difficult financial position of UNRWA, but at the same time the total financial resources had decreased, a working capital deficit had been created and new requirements had emerged, with an overall negative effect on the completion of a number of projects. Moreover, there was now a structural deficit which prevented the Agency from taking the natural demographic increase in the refugee population into account when providing services.

27. His delegation expressed strong appreciation for the efforts of donors, particularly the major donors, which had always responded to calls for additional contributions. It was to be hoped that UNRWA would manage to acquire the additional resources it needed to fulfil its objectives without having to resort to economizing measures which would have a negative impact on the services rendered to Palestinian refugees.

28. Assistance to Palestinian refugees was an integral part of the Palestinian problem. That problem had political dimensions insofar as it should be approached not only from the point of view of the refugees, but also in a wider sense. The refusal to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions meant that the Agency was forced to continue to render basic services to the Palestinian refugees under short-term assistance projects as well as long-term programmes aimed at improving the social and economic situation of refugees in the region. The work of UNRWA would continue to be essential until solutions were found to the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolutions and to the problem of the Middle East as a whole.

29. **Mr. Hossain** (Bangladesh) expressed concern over the continued funding shortfalls in UNRWA's regular budget. The cash-flow situation of the Agency was also a matter of concern. His delegation was appreciative of the US$ 12 million contributed by the United States, which would allow the Agency to meet its payroll. Since any shortfall in regular budget funding affected the well-being of the Palestinian refugees, his delegation urged the international community, particularly donors, to make funds available to the Agency to enable it to raise health and school education services to the desired levels, and to meet their obligations for the timely payment of pledged contributions.

30. His delegation greatly appreciated the role that UNRWA — despite its financial crisis — played in ensuring wide community participation in various activities, and asked it to put greater emphasis on human resource development. For its own part, Bangladesh was willing to share its experiences in the field of microcredit. It was a matter of concern that the Agency's operations during the reporting period had been interrupted on several occasions as a result of the security regime. So-called security needs should in no way compromise the well-being of the refugees, given that any reduction would have damaging consequences for the Palestinian refugees and would not serve the collective interests of the concerned parties in the region.

31. **Mr. Zohar** (Israel), having expressed appreciation to UNRWA for its good work, pointed out that the Agency's activities could not provide a definitive solution to the Arab refugee problem, for that must be determined through diplomatic negotiations between the parties concerned.

32. Insofar as the current UNRWA report did not extend to the period when the peace process had been disrupted by violence instigated by the Palestinian leadership, it offered a glimpse of the potential benefits of a more peaceful era. It noted, for example, that the flows of people between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1999 had increased in comparison with 1998. The opening on 18 October 1999 of a "safe passage" between the West Bank and Gaza Strip had facilitated communication and travel between the two areas. The real gross domestic product and gross national product in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1999 had grown by an estimated 6 and 7 per cent respectively. The residents of the Gaza Strip continued to rely heavily on employment opportunities in Israel, with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians earning at least US$ 500 a month there. He wondered if many third-world countries could point to such a record growth in GNP, or to such a rate of personal income. However, many of those positive developments had been threatened by the recent acts of violence incited by the Palestinian Authority. There was no doubt that the Palestinian side would blame Israel for its current economic hardships.

33. At the Camp David talks in July 2000, Israel had again made it clear that it would not accept the so-called "right of return" of Arab refugees to Israeli territory. It was assumed that some of them might choose to live in those areas of former Mandatory Palestine, which had come by agreement under the control of the Palestinian Authority and were outside the borders of Israel. However, Israel objected to allowing them entry into its territory. The way in which the Arab refugee problem had been created absolved Israel of any moral or legal responsibility. Strictly speaking, the question of the refugees had been generated by a deliberate campaign of Arab aggression directed against Israel from the very moment of its independence. It was highly important to recall that as a result of the war that took place, Israel had absorbed hundreds of thousands of Jews who were fleeing to safety from Arab countries and that those people had never been disparagingly called "refugees". Their living conditions gradually improved as a result of donations from Jews all over the world. Israel did not possess large reserves of oil like the Arab countries — countries which for fifty years had spent very little money providing homes and a future for their Palestinian brethren. One notable exception in that regard was Jordan, which had granted citizenship to Palestinians.

34. Fifty-two years ago, an exchange of populations had taken place. Such exchanges had also taken place as a result of other conflicts, for example those between Greece and Turkey and between India and Pakistan. The exchange was a two-way movement — a fact that should be borne in mind when calculating the cost of a peace settlement. The plight of the Arab refugees had arisen because of the Arabs' rejection of the inalienable right of the Jewish people to self-determination and to have its own State with Jerusalem as its capital. It should be emphasized that the exchange of populations that had taken place half a century ago was never going to be reversed. If Israel were to accede to the demands of Arab countries to implement the so-called "right of return" of refugees to Israeli territory, it would be tantamount to national suicide. That was clearly not one of the obligations of a Member State of the United Nations.

35. The principle set out by Mr. Ben-Ami, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, in his statement to the General Assembly might serve as a basis for a future settlement. Despite the preposterousness of the idea that a nation should create a State only in order to gather its exiles in a neighbouring State, Israel had expressed its willingness to participate actively in any international effort and fund aimed at providing the financial foundations for the resolution of the refugee problem. Out of humanitarian considerations, Israel might also accept a limited number of refugees within a scheme of family reunification. At present, the vast majority of Palestine refugees were living in Arab countries. Only one of the refugee camps was technically within the city limits of Israeli Jerusalem and was run by UNRWA. The Israeli authorities were cooperating with UNRWA within the framework of regulations established through mutual agreement, and in accordance with Israeli law. Technical problems were dealt with directly and in a generally satisfactory manner by representatives of both sides on the ground. Examples included movement of UNRWA personnel, vehicles and goods through the territory of Israel and

the Palestinian Authority, security checks at the Erez crossing between Israel and Gaza, the possibility of referring problems immediately to the Israeli Liaison Office, the period of validity of entry passes for local drivers of UNRWA vehicles, and the hours of operation of the Allenby Bridge.

36. The matter regarding the movement of goods through the Karni checkpoint had been referred to the relevant legal authorities for further study. The security problems that UNRWA had faced in the past would be lessened if and when the peace process moved forward — a matter that depended principally on Palestinian cooperation. With regard to UNRWA's claims for the refunding of expenses incurred at the Port of Ashdod for equipment imported by UNRWA for its own use, he recalled that between 1967 and July 1996, an agreement had been in effect under which Israel refunded fees paid by UNRWA to the Ashdod port authorities. Israel had subsequently informed UNRWA that, in its view, in accordance with agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority was henceforth responsible for such payments. That matter had been referred to the relevant legal authorities for further study.

37. Israel appreciated the humanitarian work of UNRWA and strongly supported the request that all donor countries continued their financial assistance to that worthy cause. Those efforts were undermined, however, by the inclusion of hostile anti-Israel propaganda contained in textbooks used by UNRWA schools. Those books, which were purchased and presumably approved by UNRWA, denied Israel's right to exist — a gross violation of the spirit and letter of the peace process itself. Israel strongly urged the Committee to supervise the material being taught to Palestinian schoolchildren in order to ensure that a new generation was educated in the ways of peace and good-neighbourly relations. Recurrence of the recent tragic incidents would only be prevented through a concerted effort to educate Arab children to see their Jewish neighbours in a more tolerant light. In conclusion, his delegation noted that the principle of rationalization within the United Nations would be better served by consolidating the many resolutions on the subject under consideration into one — a resolution trimmed of irrelevant political verbiage that would provide a better focus on the key humanitarian issue of the refugees.

38. In response to the comments of the representative of Lebanon concerning the common border with Israel, he recalled that Israel had withdrawn forces from Southern Lebanon in full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). In Security Council resolution 1310 (2000), the Security Council had called for the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in the area, and for the Government of Lebanon to ensure the return of its effective authority and presence in the south, and in particular to proceed with a significant deployment of the Lebanese armed forces as soon as possible and to ensure a calm environment throughout the south. That must include taking full control over the area in proximity to the fence on the border with Israel and preventing disorder and acts of violence directed towards Israeli territory. Israel therefore called upon the other parties, chiefly the Government of Lebanon, to fulfil their responsibilities under the aforementioned resolutions, which entailed putting an end to those violations of Israeli sovereignty, establishing effective Lebanese authority in the area and acting to bring peace and security to the common border between Israel and Lebanon.

39. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the recent outbreak of violence in many of the areas served by UNRWA was a cause of grave concern. Under the prevailing conditions even greater demands were being placed on the limited resources of the agencies attempting to provide a normal standard of living for the refugees. The Holy See called upon the international community to continue to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in bringing an end to violence and addressing the basic issues of justice and freedom. UNRWA and the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, founded in 1949, would continue to provide humanitarian assistance to refugees, but that should not be understood as a substitute for a just, stable and definitive solution to the problems of the region. That solution would, his delegation hoped, include the question of the city of Jerusalem.

40. In the light of the recent acts of violence, the Holy See renewed its consistent call for an internationally guaranteed statute to safeguard the sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims. It noted that for some time, the unique character of Jerusalem had resulted in de facto control of sacred sites by the appropriate religious authorities, regardless of who held political control. The proper recognition of the

spiritual patrimony of the three monotheistic religions, under international guarantees, must be a part of the negotiation process which would bring peace to the region. Because Jerusalem held such spiritual importance to believers representing almost 45 per cent of the world's population, a comprehensive, just and lasting solution, as recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution ES-10/2, should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the Holy Places by the faithful of all religions and nationalities. Moreover, his delegation believed that the Holy Places should receive protection from their use for political gain.

41. His delegation appealed for greater international solidarity and the political will to end violence and bring justice and security to all peoples in the regions served by UNRWA and various non-governmental agencies. Pope John Paul II, speaking to refugees in Deheisheh camp, had urged them to continue to believe in the task they were fulfilling. Genuine and practical solidarity with those in need was not a favour conceded, but a demand of shared humanity and a recognition of the dignity of every human being.

42. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that UNRWA remained indispensable under the existing conditions and reaffirmed that resolving the problem of Palestine refugees was a prerequisite for establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. Such a solution should be based on total withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967 and implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions.

43. The United Nations had a responsibility towards all aspects of the question of Palestine, including the problem of Palestine refugees. The international community must provide UNRWA with all necessary political and financial support in order to do its work until a comprehensive and lasting settlement was achieved that would allow Palestine refugees to return to their homes.

44. The Organization of the Islamic Conference supported the proposal of the delegation of Palestine for the revitalization of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, established by the General Assembly in resolution 194 (III) of 1948, to resolve the issue of the return of Palestinian refugees or their compensation. It should be emphasized that the issue of compensation for refugees was considered an integral element but not a substitute for their right of return. That principle had been reaffirmed during the International Conference on Palestine Refugees held in Paris in April 1999 by the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States. In closing, he commended the work of the Agency, which carried out its mandate despite serious hardships, and expressed gratitude to countries which for decades had hosted Palestine refugees and displaced persons, in particular Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt. His delegation was also grateful to donor countries and hoped that they would increase their contributions to the Agency.

45. *Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

46. **Mr. Hansen** (Commissioner-General, UNRWA) expressed his gratitude to the members of the Committee participating in the debate and offering their strong support to the Agency's activities. That support would, he hoped, be reflected on the level of the financing of the Agency, which remained significantly below the level of political support. In recent times UNRWA had faced exceptionally serious problems resulting from insufficient financial resources. For more than five years, the Agency had not been able to raise the salaries of its staff, who constantly demonstrated self-sacrifice and the readiness to work in difficult conditions, which, as had been particularly evident over the past two weeks, could have tragic consequences.

47. He believed that, with the availability of full funding for a high level of projects, which had always been characteristic of UNRWA, it would manage to hold on until the time when there was no longer any need for it. That would make it possible to sustain the refugees' faith that the international community had not lost interest in their fate. He was deeply grateful to those countries which had made generous contributions to the budget of UNRWA, and hoped that Member States would fulfil their obligations towards the financing of the Agency.

48. **Mr. Shraideh** (Jordan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that in conferring citizenship on

Palestine refugees, his country had done so without prejudice to their exercise of all their rights. They continued to have the right to return and to full compensation for the material and moral losses they had incurred.

49. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Permanent Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of Israel had again attempted to deny Israeli responsibility for the disastrous situation of Palestine refugees. Israel had a moral, legal and financial responsibility to resolve the question of Palestine. Nobody doubted that the Palestine refugees were unable to return to their homes solely as a result of Israel's intransigence. The Palestine refugees living in camps in the Occupied Territories remained under the Israeli occupation to which the entire Palestinian people, especially refugees, continued to be exposed. The current situation was the direct result of Israeli provocation which had begun on 28 September and had continued to date. Israeli tanks and armed forces were concentrated around the Palestinian settlements, and it was Israel that was using excessive force against civilians.

50. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the assertions made by the representative of Israel had no basis in reality. The Arab people, famous for their patience and their firm belief in the possibility of peaceful coexistence, had not persecuted Jews remaining in Arab countries and had always behaved towards them with great respect. Israel had been behind the events which had forced them to emigrate. The notion of population exchange to which the representative of Israel had referred was somewhat surprising. People were not goods to be bought or sold.

51. It was Israel that was guilty of exiling the Palestinians; therefore it would be unfair to expect Arab countries to shoulder the full burden of the Palestine refugees. It was not right to assume that the oil-producing Arab countries should see to the welfare of people who had been placed in a disastrous situation at Israel's behest. He stressed that the Palestine refugees who currently resided in many countries of the world, wanted to return to their homes, towns and villages.

52. *The Committee thereby concluded its general debate of agenda item 84.*

Agenda item 82: Effects of atomic radiation

Draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.6/Rev.1.

53. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take action on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.4/55/L.6/Rev.1.

54. *Draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.6/Rev.1 was adopted.*

55. **Mr. Ling** (Belarus), speaking in explanation of his country's position after the adoption of the draft resolution, said that his delegation had joined the consensus decision on the draft resolution since most of the amendments proposed by the delegations of Belarus and Ukraine had been accommodated in the revised draft. At the same time, the Republic of Belarus assumed that the substance of the amendments introduced should be understood as follows: firstly, in the second preambular paragraph and in paragraph 2 beginning with the words "Taking (takes) note with appreciation of the work of the (...) Scientific Committee (...) and of the release of its extensive report", the words "with appreciation" related only to the activities of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and not to the contents of its report, whose conclusions in respect of the chapter devoted to the effects of radiation on human beings after the Chernobyl disaster (annex J of the report of the Scientific Committee for 2000) did not correspond to the actual situation with respect to the medical consequences of the catastrophe; second, paragraph 4 of the draft resolution, ending with the words "... and invites the Scientific Committee to submit its programme of work to the General Assembly", envisage a timely presentation by the Scientific Committee of its programme and plan of work to States Members of the United Nations so that scientists and experts from interested countries should have sufficient time to communicate their latest scientific data and research findings to the Scientific Committee so that they might be taken into account in the preparation by the Committee of its future scientific reports; third, the new paragraph 9 which read "Invites the Scientific Committee to continue its consultations with scientists and experts from interested Member States in the process of preparing future scientific reports" was seen as a vital element of the resolution establishing the feedback mechanisms between the Scientific Committee and interested Member States and providing for close and mutually beneficial international cooperation with the broadest possible

involvement of scientists and experts in the field of radiology.

56. His delegation confirmed its readiness to cooperate fully with the Scientific Committee in its future work studying the epidemiological and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl accident and in the exchange of data and information in that field, and requested that the issue of further study of the medical and environmental consequences of the Chernobyl accident should be included in the Committee's immediate plan of work.

57. **Mr. Yel'chenko** (Ukraine), speaking after the vote in explanation of his country's position, said that the consensus approval of the resolution on the effects of atomic radiation did not necessarily imply common consent. In that connection, his delegation wished to place on record some of the reservations that had compelled it to remove its name from the list of sponsors of the resolution that had just been adopted.

58. The current report of the Scientific Committee and its scientific annexes, which paid particular attention to the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and its consequences, had been brought to the attention of the competent authorities in Ukraine, in particular experts from the National Academy of Sciences, and carefully studied by them. An analysis of the document showed that a great deal of the most recent data and results of the studies on the effect of the Chernobyl accident on the health of the Ukrainian population recently carried out by Ukraine and other interested countries had not been adequately reflected in the report. In particular, the report omitted some proven scientific findings and presented conclusions and observations that ran counter to scientific facts and the existing reality. For that reason, Ukraine could not consider the content of the report satisfactory and had reservations regarding a positive assessment.

59. The delegations of Ukraine and Belarus had submitted a series of amendments to the resolution which had, to a large extent, been incorporated in the text. They related in the first instance to the need for further consultations between the Scientific Committee and experts and scientists from interested Member States in the process of preparing future reports of the Committee. For Ukraine, interested Member States referred in the first place to those States that were under study by the Committee. Strengthening the mechanism for consultation would ensure greater transparency and objectivity in the results of the Committee's analyses. The members of the Committee should establish closer contacts with scientific circles in Ukraine, especially during the study of the effects of the Chernobyl accident, and should visit the Chernobyl zone more frequently to obtain first-hand information concerning the effects of atomic radiation on the population of Ukraine.

60. The two delegations had also underlined the importance of increased coordination between the Scientific Committee and the General Assembly by inviting the Committee to submit its programme of work to the General Assembly. Such action would enable Member States to provide the Scientific Committee with up-to-date data in a timely manner, thus making a valuable contribution to the Committee's work.

61. Despite the extensive scientific and medical knowledge about the effects of atomic radiation, many important questions concerning the effects of radiation on human health still remained unanswered fourteen years after the Chernobyl accident. That fact underlined the need to continue scientific studies and assessment of the effects of the Chernobyl accident on human health, making full use of the information and data provided by Member States through the consultation mechanism. Ukraine recommended that the Scientific Committee should, in its future plans, provide for further study of the effects on human health of ionizing radiation from the Chernobyl accident, and was willing to provide the Committee with all available data in that regard.

Agenda item 83: International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space

Draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.8

62. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take a decision on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.4/55/L.8.

63. **Mr. Eguiguren** (Chile) said that his delegation had submitted draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.8 on behalf of the Working Group of the Whole on International Cooperation on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The Secretariat had provided information on the budgetary implications of paragraphs 28 and 29 of the draft resolution, in connection with which some delegations had made specific reservations. Agreement had finally

been reached, and paragraph 29 of draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.8 should be amended to read as follows: "Requests the Secretary-General to start implementing those measures and activities that are contained in the above-mentioned plan of action and are currently within the programme of work of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, based on the recommendations of UNISPACE III, and to ensure the full implementation of the plan with necessary resources in 2002;".

64. His delegation hoped that the amendment that he had read out would be incorporated in paragraph 29 of the draft resolution and that the draft would be adopted by consensus at a subsequent meeting in the near future.

65. **The Chairman** said that the Committee would take a decision on draft resolution A/C.4/55/L.8 at a later stage in its work.

66. **Mr. Mekdad** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on agenda items 84 and 85 was not entirely appropriate, and he appealed to the Chairman and members of the Committee to extend the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions until Thursday, 2 November 2000. That would enable consultations to be held on the draft resolutions on those two agenda items. If more time were required, the matter might be considered again.

67. **The Chairman** suggested that, in the light of the request by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions should be extended until 6 p.m. on Thursday, 2 November 2000.

68. **It was so decided**.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.